

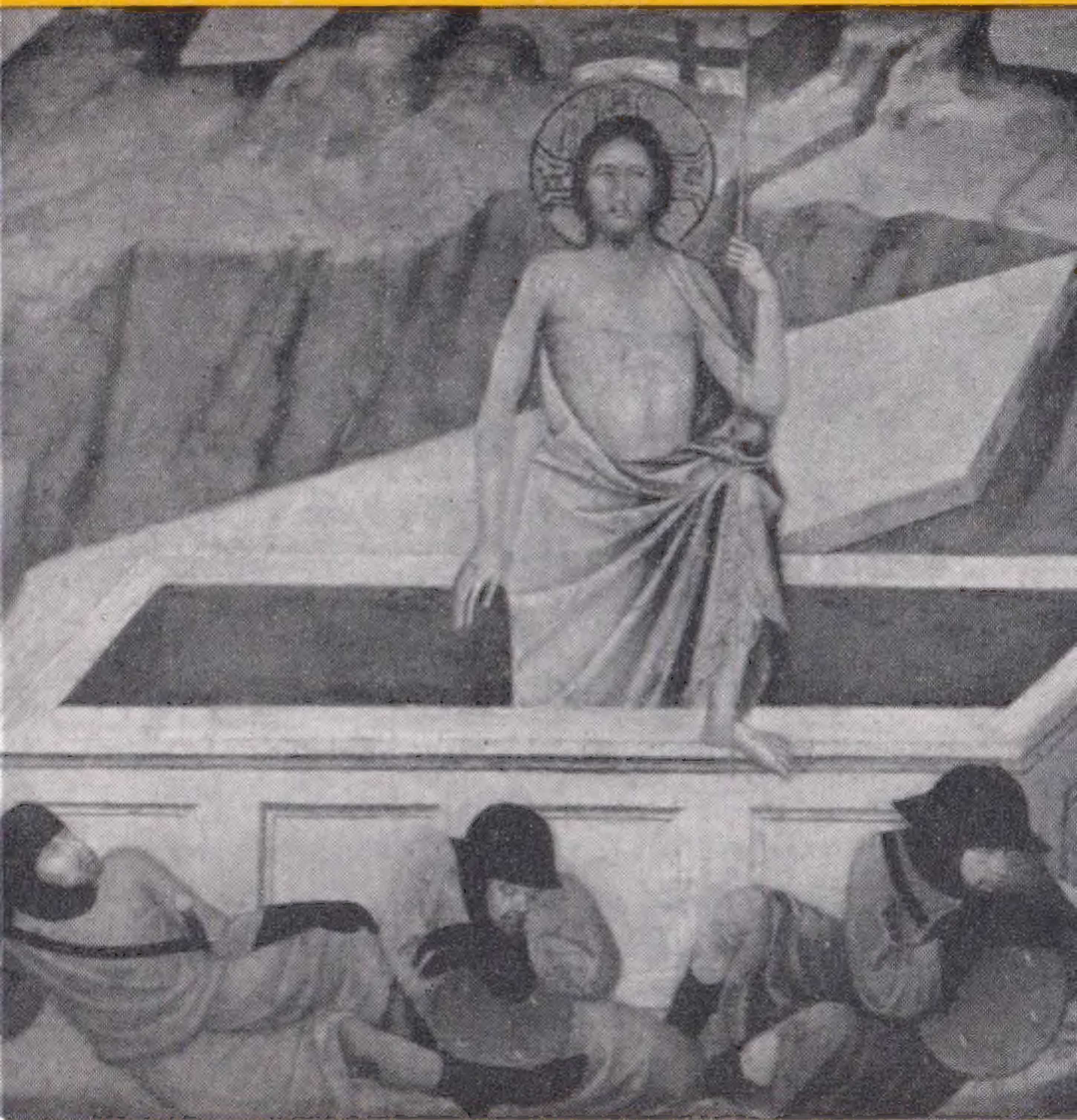
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ALIVE FROM THE DEAD



ALIVE FROM THE DEAD

DEAD MAN LIVES AGAIN—if you saw that headline in your newspaper you would expect the paragraph to describe some marvel of modern medical achievement, whereby a man's heart that had stopped beating was made to start again. It would be wonderful, but not strictly miraculous. But the Christian Church is founded on the fact that Jesus of Nazareth *was crucified, dead and buried, . . . the third day he rose again from the dead* (Apostles' Creed). There is no doubt that he died, for he had been scourged, had hung on a cross for six hours, and after his death had had his side pierced by a spear-thrust in order to make quite sure that he was dead. On Friday evening his body was buried, it lay lifeless in the tomb all Saturday, and on Sunday that same body was out of the tomb, animated once more by its soul, and the astonished disciples of Jesus worshipped their risen Master and God.

How can we be sure that the story is true? First of all, it links up with the rest of what we know about Jesus (see *Is He God?* and *Born of a Virgin* in this series). It is not an isolated marvel, but is the culmination of a life of marvels. Jesus was and is perfect God and perfect man, and it was fitting that his mastery of sin and death should be proclaimed by resurrection from the dead.

Secondly, the historical evidence is very good. St. Paul, whose conversion to Christianity was due to the appearance of the ascended Jesus to him outside Damascus (Acts xxii, 6–10), gives in one of his letters the official list of Christ's resurrection appearances (I Corinthians xv, 5–8). This letter was written in 55 A.D., twenty-five years after the resurrection. But St. Paul says (I Corinthians xv, 3) that he “received” this list, presumably im-

mediately upon his conversion, in the year 33 A.D. No-one can pretend therefore that the resurrection is a miracle unknown to the earliest followers of Jesus, which crept in "later". Plainly it formed the message of the first Christians, as indeed the *Acts of the Apostles* states.

The official list records (1) an appearance to St. Peter, (2) to the Twelve, (3) to 500 disciples, (4) to St. James, (5) to all the apostles, (6) to St. Paul himself. (1) is referred to in Luke xxiv, 34; (2) is described in Luke xxiv, 36 and John xx, 19; (3) is perhaps the appearance described in Matthew xxviii, 16; (4) is not mentioned elsewhere; (5) is probably described in Acts i, 4. In any case it is not an exhaustive list, as our gospels show, but appearances to the holy women were excluded from the official list, perhaps because for

propaganda purposes the witness of women might be less convincing.

Not only had St. Paul's own life been changed by the appearance of Jesus to him outside Damascus, but he had met those who had seen Jesus during the forty days after Easter (e.g. Galatians i, 18-19). Many of those witnesses were still alive when he wrote to the Corinthians, and he appeals confidently to their testimony (I Corinthians xv, 6). The evidence for Christ's resurrection is thus very good.

Our four gospels were all of them written *after* St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians. That does not mean that they are less reliable; as has been shown, they supply independent confirmation of

what St. Paul wrote. But for purposes of argument St. Paul's testimony is more important.

It is only possible to deny our Lord's resurrection if you start from the belief that it is impossible. The explanations suggested by non-Christian writers about "what really happened" are lame and unconvincing, e.g. that the Lord's body was stolen, that he never really died, that his followers imagined that they had seen him, etc. There was a journalist who planned to write a book entitled, *Jesus: the last phase*, dealing with the last week of the life of Jesus on the assumption that no resurrection took place. But study of the evidence led him to the conclusion that the resurrection did take place, and he wrote instead, *Who Moved the Stone?* (Frank Morison: Faber, 6s. 6d.).

No-one believes that on Easter Day Jesus merely came to life again and resumed his old existence. Henceforward his body was glorified, not subject to the limitations of earthly life. He appeared and disappeared at will (Luke xxiv, 31 and 36), but showed his followers that he was not just a ghost (Luke xxiv 39). He appeared to them in his old body, but it was the old body transformed, with its limitations transcended. Does this give us an idea of what *our* resurrection-bodies will be like?

Lastly, millions of Christians during the last 2,000 years have prayed to Jesus as their Master and God every day, and know from their own experience that he is "alive for evermore" (Revelation i, 18). That was the experience of the first Christian martyr (Acts vii, 55) and can be yours too.

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